CENSUS FAMILIES IN ALBERTA AND CANADA

INTRODUCTION

Family structure and size have important socioeconomic and policy implications. This spotlight highlights the structure and size of census families in Alberta and Canada.

A census family is defined as a married couple or a common-law couple, with or without children, or a lone parent living with at least one child in the same dwelling. The latest data from Statistics Canada indicates that the number of census families in Alberta has gradually increased from 787,000 in 1999 to 977,000 in 2009; the growth rate has moderated from 2.4% to 2.1% during the same period (**Figure 1**)[1]. Overall, total census families grew at an average annual rate of 2.2% over the past decade, in line with the average annual population growth of 2.2% observed during the same period for the province.

At the national level, the number of census families has grown at an average rate of 1.2% annually between 1999 and 2009. As a result, Alberta's share of census families in Canada has been gradually increasing from 9.8% in 2002 to 10.5% in 2009 (**Table 1**). Compared to other provinces, Alberta had the highest average annual growth rate of census families (**Figure 2**), followed by Ontario (1.4%) and British Columbia (1.3%).

CENSUS FAMILIES BY STRUCTURE

Census family structure is categorized into husband-wife and lone-parent families. A husband-wife family consists of a husband and a wife (or a common-law couple), with or without children. A lone-parent family refers to a lone parent of any marital status with at least one child living in the same dwelling. As Alberta's share of total national population has risen, the province's proportions of both husband-wife and lone-parent census families in Canada have also been steadily rising each year. Specially, the share of husband-wife census families increased from 10.0% in 2002 to 10.7% in 2009, while the share of lone-

Figure 1: Growth Rates of Census Families, Alberta vs. Canada

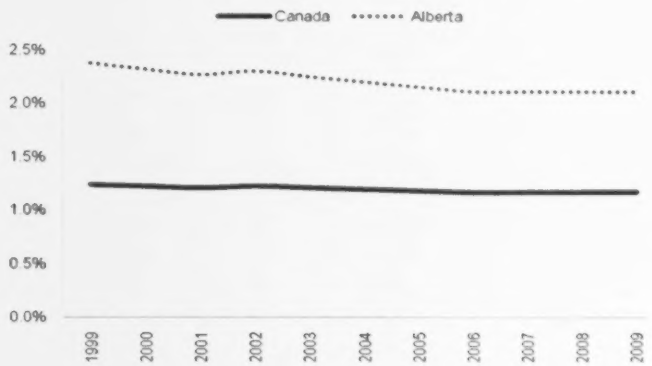
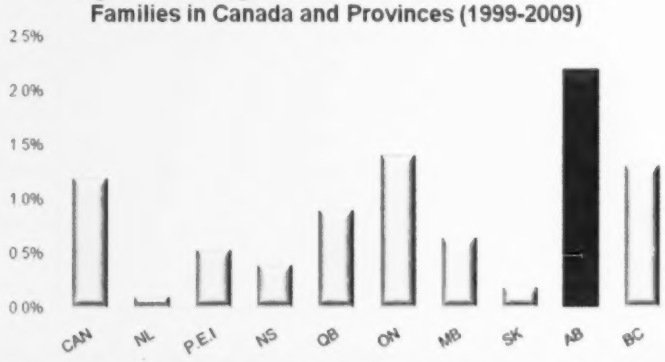


Table 1: Census Families by Structure

	Total Share	Husband-wife			Lone-parent		
		Alberta	Canada	Share	Alberta	Canada	Share
2002	9.8%	720,534	7,232,056	10.0%	121,364	1,352,947	9.0%
2003	9.9%	736,642	7,314,982	10.1%	124,157	1,373,637	9.0%
2004	10.0%	752,749	7,397,909	10.2%	126,950	1,394,325	9.1%
2005	10.1%	768,857	7,480,836	10.3%	129,743	1,415,014	9.2%
2006	10.2%	784,965	7,563,767	10.4%	132,535	1,435,697	9.2%
2007	10.3%	801,413	7,647,882	10.5%	135,385	1,456,599	9.3%
2008	10.4%	818,208	7,733,199	10.6%	138,294	1,477,721	9.4%
2009	10.5%	835,357	7,819,733	10.7%	141,263	1,499,069	9.4%

Figure 2: Average Annual Growth Rate of Census Families in Canada and Provinces (1999-2009)



[1] All data used in this spotlight are from Statistics Canada.

parent census families rose from 9.0% to 9.4% during the same period.

HUSBAND-WIFE FAMILIES

Husband-wife families have consistently accounted for about 86% of Alberta's total census families. The number of husband-wife families has gradually increased from 720,000 in 2002 to 835,000 in 2009 (**Figure 3**), yielding an average annual growth rate of 2.1%. Similarly, husband-wife families also constituted the majority of Canada's census families (about 84%), but they grew at a slower pace than Alberta. The number of husband-wife families grew about 1.1% annually on average in Canada between 2002 and 2009, bringing the total from 7.6 million to 7.8 million.

Young families in Alberta, i.e., both husband and wife aged 15-24, increased from 17,000 in 2002 to 21,000 in 2009 (**Table 2**). In contrast, the number of young families at the national level declined from 110,000 in 2002 to 106,000 in 2009. As a result, Alberta's share of young families at the national level grew from 15.5% in 2002 to 19.7% in 2009.

Census families are dominated by the age group 25-54. This group increased to 361,000 in 2009 from 331,000 in 2002. For Canada, however, the number of census families in this group shrank slowly over the same period.

The number of senior census families grew at the fastest pace among all age groups at both provincial and the national levels. In particular, Alberta's senior families grew at an annual rate of 4.5% compared to the Canadian growth rate of 3.6%.

LONE-PARENT FAMILIES

Lone-parent families represented 14% of the total census families in Alberta and the number of lone-parent families increased slightly from 121,000 to 141,000 for the period 2002-2009. Meanwhile, lone-parent families in Canada constituted 16% of the total census families and the number of lone-parent families grew gradually from 1.4 million in 2002 to 1.5 million in 2009.

The total number of lone-parent families can be further classified by the gender of the parent (mother or father) that the children are primarily living with. Female parent families accounted for the vast majority of lone-parent families (**Table 3**), approximately 78% and 80% respectively for Alberta and

Figure 3: Census Families by Structure, Alberta

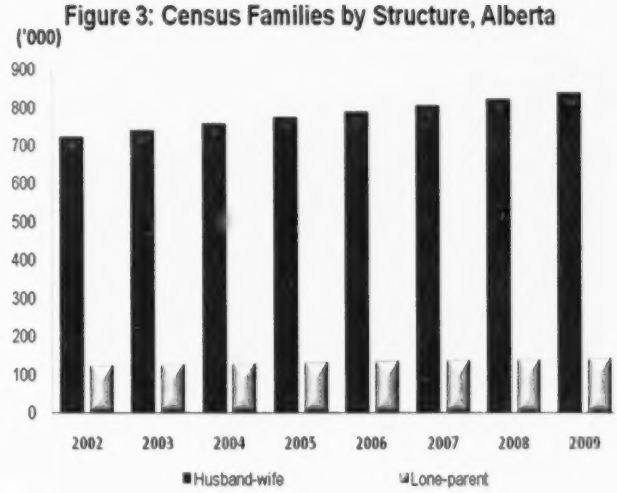


Table 2: Census Families by Age Group, Alberta vs. Canada

	Alberta			Canada		
	15-24	25-54	55+	15-24	25-54	55+
2002	17,040	331,048	130,241	109,991	3,136,490	1,568,068
2003	17,566	335,183	136,889	109,355	3,130,066	1,631,331
2004	18,092	339,324	143,538	108,720	3,123,625	1,694,579
2005	18,618	343,474	150,185	108,084	3,117,118	1,757,810
2006	19,144	347,611	156,832	107,450	3,110,724	1,821,067
2007	19,678	351,878	163,547	106,834	3,104,795	1,884,570
2008	20,221	356,343	170,339	106,239	3,099,509	1,948,412
2009	20,773	360,933	177,214	105,669	3,094,400	2,012,519

Table 3: Lone-parent Census Families

	Alberta			Canada		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2002	20.5%	79.5%	100%	19.0%	81.0%	100%
2003	20.7%	79.3%	100%	19.2%	80.8%	100%
2004	20.9%	79.1%	100%	19.5%	80.6%	100%
2005	21.1%	78.9%	100%	19.7%	80.3%	100%
2006	21.3%	78.7%	100%	19.9%	80.1%	100%
2007	21.5%	78.5%	100%	20.1%	79.9%	100%
2008	21.6%	78.4%	100%	20.3%	79.7%	100%
2009	21.8%	78.2%	100%	20.5%	79.5%	100%

Canada over the period 2002-2009. Although the number of male parent families was relatively small, its share has been increasing every year both at the provincial and the national levels.

CENSUS FAMILIES BY SIZE

Small families constituted the largest share of total census families in Alberta. In 2009, families with two members accounted for almost half (49%) of Alberta total census families (**Figure 4**); families with three or four members accounted for the other 40%; while large size families (5 members or more) accounted for the rest. Among the five different size categories, the number of smaller sized families has grown faster. The number of census families with two members increased 3.1% annually on average between 2002 and 2009 (**Figure 5**), the highest among all the groups. This was followed by census families with three members (2.3%) and four members (1.0%). Census families with six or more members were the only group that showed a marginal decline during the same period.

Similar to Alberta, the number of small families at the national level also grew more rapidly than the other type of family sizes. Specifically, the number of families with two members increased 2.1% annually between 2002 and 2009. The number of families with five and six plus members decreased respectively at an annual average rate of 0.6% and 1.3% for the same period.

The average size of a census family has been relatively stable and similar over the years for both Alberta and Canada. Overall, an average census family, including husband-wife and lone-parent families, was approximately 3.0 people in Alberta and Canada from 2002 to 2009 (**Table 4**). The average size of husband-wife families was relatively bigger than lone-parent families. In 2009, an average Alberta/Canadian husband-wife family had 3.0 people, compared to 2.5 people for a lone-parent family.

In conclusion, the number of census families in Alberta has grown faster than the national average, which was in line with the overall population growth. Husband-wife families continue to be the mainstream of traditional census families. In contrast to a downward trend in the total number of young families in Canada, Alberta has experienced a steady increase in this segment of census families. One common phenomenon shared by both Alberta and Canada is that the number of small size families has risen faster than any other family sizes and constituted the largest share of census families.

Figure 4: Census Family by Size in 2009, Alberta

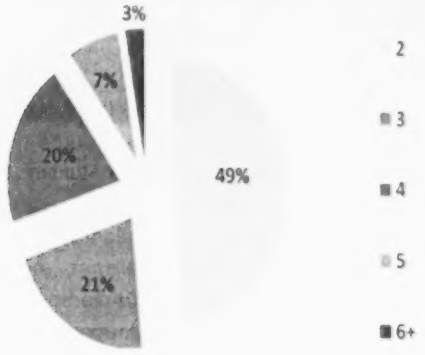


Figure 5: Annual Growth Rate of Census Families by Size (2002-2009)

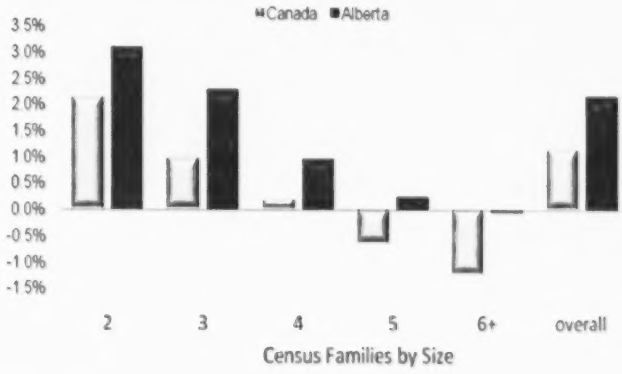


Table 4: Average Family Size, Alberta vs. Canada

	Alberta			Canada		
	Husband-wife families	Lone-parent families	Total	Husband-wife families	Lone-parent families	Total
2002	3.1	2.6	3.0	3.1	2.5	3.0
2003	3.1	2.6	3.0	3.1	2.5	3.0
2004	3.1	2.6	3.0	3.0	2.5	3.0
2005	3.1	2.5	3.0	3.0	2.5	2.9
2006	3.1	2.5	3.0	3.0	2.5	2.9
2007	3.0	2.5	3.0	3.0	2.5	2.9
2008	3.0	2.5	3.0	3.0	2.5	2.9
2009	3.0	2.5	2.9	3.0	2.5	2.9